“Bolted in” not “bolted on” is the catch cry at Briar Road Public School, which has received national recognition for its Aboriginal education programs by earning the coveted Arthur Hamilton Award from the Australian Education Union.

The motto of the western Sydney school is “Courage and Determination”, and Briar Road principal Tammy Anderson said Aboriginal education at the school, is delivered using a community-consulted strategic plan.

“Culture is embedded as an integral part of the fabric of the school and the love and passion for culture, between students and the community is evident in the way in which the school functions each and every day,” Ms Anderson said.

“All staff are encouraged and supported to make Aboriginal education a whole of school responsibility.

“Aboriginal education at Briar Road Public School is a core component of the school’s teaching and learning program. There is an integrated approach to the design and delivery of cultural lessons, ensuring authenticity and validity within the content taught.”

The AEU award commemorates the achievements of Arthur Hamilton, a Palawa man who was active in promoting cross-cultural awareness, recognition of Indigenous peoples and the right for Aboriginal students to access high quality public education.

The school uses a “Koori room” for cultural lessons but also runs a range of programs including an immersive tour to western NSW, a four-day professional learning activity the school hosts for teachers in its region.

“The tour takes participants to western NSW to walk and learn on country,” Ms Anderson said. “Aboriginal staff members, and uncles and aunties from communities such as Dubbo and Gilgandra, have created this unique experience and share stories and individual experiences of growing up as Aboriginal people and the impact that history has today.”

It has received participant feedback comments that include: “I hope that every staff member gets the opportunity to experience such authentic culture and real-world learning about Aboriginal culture. This trip has helped me feel more confident and informed in order to support Indigenous kids develop a strong connection to history, culture and country.”

Along with cultural events, such as NAIDOC Week celebrations, Harmony Day, Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day, elders’ morning teas, Yarn Up, Heart Beat and inter-school academic challenges, Briar Road also hosts other schools throughout the year to learn how to support the needs of Aboriginal students in their...
classrooms.

Briar Road — which has an Indigenous student population of 32 per cent and an Aboriginal staff level of 25 per cent — has also developed programs that cater for students entering preschool, kindergarten, support units and high school transitions.

“Students from the primary part of the school visit the preschool to implement a buddy program,” Ms Anderson said. “Aboriginal girls from the Sista Speak program attend our local independent Aboriginal preschool to read to young children and develop friendships before the children start at our school the following year.

“The school has implemented a variety of strategies that have been so successful that they have been taken on board as departmental strategies such as the Bodallamau Early Years Backpack resource.

“Our strategies have also been highly valued by many others across the wider school network who, on many occasions, have called upon our expert knowledge to mentor colleagues and students across many schools.”

Briar Road Public School executive and staff are committed to ensuring that wellbeing is also embedded in school planning and practice.

“The school has a number of structures in place that support student and staff wellbeing, including programs such as Sista Speak, Bro Speak, Spinal Outreach Team (SPOT) programs, Chill Out and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL),” Ms Anderson said.

“Wellbeing is a core responsibility for each executive staff member, with an assistant principal having the responsibility for implementing wellbeing practices and processes across the school.”

To find out more about the Arthur Hamilton Award visit aeufederal.org.au/our-work/indigenous.

— Scott Coomber